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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 000543

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SUBJECT: HAITI ELECTION NEWS ROUND-UP

REF: PORT-AU-PRINCE 476

Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) is completing review of claims arising from the February 7 General Election and should finalize candidate lists for second round Senate and Chamber of Deputy candidates by March ¶20. According to CEP Director General Jacques Bernard, at least five districts will require new first round elections due to voided results from the February 7 contest. The CEP is studying problems from the first round in order to run smoother elections in April. They are paying particular attention to improving operations at voting centers. National Identity Card(CIN)/Voter Registration Card distribution is at 91 percent with a requested correction/change rate of only 0.3 percent. Additional opportunities for correction and/or changes to the CINs will be possible prior to the local and municipal elections announced by the CEP for June 18. The official electoral calendar, including the inauguration date of President-elect Preval, is still pending publication through a Presidential decree. End Summary.

Electoral Disputes

¶2. (SBU) CEP Director General Jacques Bernard told the donors group March 14 that the review of electoral disputes at the national level should be completed by March 16. Of the 133 claims filed nationwide, 43 cases rose to the national level for decision by the National Bureau for Electoral Disputes (BCEN). Initial reports are that the results from five districts will be declared void and the election for Chamber of Deputies, and possibly the Senate, will be re-run in those districts. Presidential candidates will not be included as the CEP determined that the results would not effect the outcome of that race as it currently stands. Bernard identified the five districts (circonscriptions) in question as La Chappelle (Artibonite Department), Gros Morne (Artibonite Department), Grand Saline (Artibonite Department), Bombardopolis/Baie de Henne (North West Department), and Pestel/Beaumont (Grand Anse Department).

¶3. (SBU) The reasons for re-running the election in these districts vary but include burnt polling places with destroyed ballots, one case of voter/candidate intimidation that precluded other members of the political party from attempting to vote, and one instance of a ballot misprint

with the wrong photo printed with the name of the candidate. The CEP will hold new elections for all Deputy candidates in the voided districts concurrently with the second round run-off scheduled for April 21. A second round for those disputed districts will then be held as a special election, possibly in conjunction with the local and municipal elections.

¶4. (C) Pierre Richard Duchemin, the CEP Counselor responsible for managing the dispute process, told poloff that he and others members of the BCEN established a standard operating procedure to evaluate claims thereby enhancing transparency and facilitating review of its decisions. Duchemin and the BCEN team initiated daily telephone contact with each Departmental Elections Bureau (BED) to manage the dispute process. The majority of claims were resolved at the BED-level. (Comment: This integration of the BEDs into the electoral process is a step toward correcting a recognized weakness of the electoral organization. The BEDs should play an important, managerial role but have been marginalized to the detriment of establishing and strengthening the institution itself. End Comment.)

Second Round Preparations

¶5. (SBU) The CEP announced March 10 that the second round of the elections will take place, Friday, April 21. (reftel) CEP President Max Mathurin also announced that local and municipal elections will be held June 18. To formalize the CEP's proposed electoral calendar, the executive must issue a Presidential decree to take effect upon publication in the official government gazette, Le Moniteur. The IGOH/Preval

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transition team is working to determine the date for the investiture of Parliament and the subsequent inauguration of President-elect Preval.

¶6. (C) Preparations for the second round include troubleshooting to address some of the most obvious problems from the first round. All aspects of the February 7 election are being reviewed to identify problems, address weaknesses and make corrections according to DG Bernard and MINUSTAH Elections Chief Gerardo Le Chevallier. MINUSTAH election officials, in conjunction with the CEP, have reviewed claims of inadequate voting centers (VCs), particularly the mega-centers in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, resulting in the expansion of 50 voting centers with the addition of annexes, relocation of 40 centers and four new VCs. Among other adjustments, these changes will require communication to all affected voters of their new VC and BV. Poll workers will receive an extra week of training and DG Bernard told donors that personnel will be hired specifically for directing voters to the appropriate polling place, Bureau de Vote (BV), within the VCs.

¶7. (SBU) The voting kits used in the first round will not be changed for the April 21 run-off despite some inadequacies. However, some improvements are envisioned including provision of extra candles and "fresh" indelible ink markers.

National Identity Card Distribution and Status

¶8. (C) OAS reports that 91 percent (3.2 of 3.5 million) of the National Identity Cards have been distributed. The final registration tally for the period covering April 24, 2005, through October 15, 2005, represents 77 percent of the estimated eligible population. Despite rumored claims of significant problems with the database and mistakes on the CINs, the OAS technical team received approximately 10,200 requests for changes and/or corrections from citizens. This represents an error rate of only 0.3 percent, lower than the expected rate of 0.5 - 1.0 percent. The CEP is planning a formal "verification" period for the CIN and voter rolls

prior to the local and municipal elections during which remaining changes or corrections may be requested. Pending issues for the post-electoral period include the transfer of the technology to the GOH and the re-opening of registration rolls for those not yet registered including those who have turned 18 since registration closed.

Tentative Timeline

¶9. (SBU) The timeline for the remaining phases of the electoral process leaves little room for any delays. The most immediate pending issue is the CEP's prompt approval and announcement of the final candidate list once the dispute period is complete. A tentative/rpt/tentative timeline follows:

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3/16 Dispute Phase Complete
3/17-19 CEP Approval and Announcement of Final Candidate
 List
3/20-21 Preparations for Printing Ballots
3/22-25 Printing Ballots for nine Departments
 (not incl. West)
3/30-4/3 Printing Ballots for West Department
4/4-12 Distribution of non-sensitive voting kit
 materials
4/17-20 Distribution of sensitive materials
4/21 Election Day
4/28 Preliminary/Partial Results Announced by CEP
4/29 Investiture of Parliament
4/30 Inauguration of President-elect Preval
TBD Special Election/Second Round Run-off for five
 districts
6/18 Local and Municipal Elections

Note: the printing company has long-standing contractual commitment for printing services to another client for period 3/26-29. End Note.

Comment

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¶10. (C) Comment: Previously DG Bernard's biggest nemesis, CEP Counselor Duchemin has been on his best behavior while managing the dispute process, enforcing a rigorous schedule, and otherwise not interfering with Bernard. In the past, Duchemin has performed commendably when focused on a given task. With the dispute process coming to an end, we will closely monitor his behavior.

¶11. (C) Comment continued: Completion of the dispute process must be followed by prompt action by the CEP to formalize the final candidate list allowing for expeditious printing of the ballots. With DG Bernard's return, electoral preparations and MINUSTAH and CEP activity levels are high, auguring well for holding to the April 21 election date. End comment.
SANDERSON